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ABSTRACT

Nagorik Uddyog (Citizen's Initiative) is a non-profit, non-governmental Bangladeshi organization focused on empowering women at the grassroots level through human rights education. Although women constitute half of the total population of Bangladesh, their participation in social, cultural, and political activities is limited. Recently, significant changes have taken place to make women more visible, yet they still remain disadvantaged compared to their male counterparts because of inequities in education, employment, participation in decision-making, and family matters. Nagorik Uddyog created this manual to educate semi-literate and illiterate women about their rights as women and as citizens of Bangladesh in the public and political spheres. Chapter 1 covers the social/political/economic problems and position of women in Bangladesh. How the law, misuse of religion, and Fatwabazi (sermon-givers) deprive women of their human rights is the topic of chapter 2. In chapter 3, women's rights in the Constitution and United Nations Conference on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UNCEDAW) are explored. The subject of chapter 4 is women's rights in political and public life. All chapters feature activities and questions to stimulate learning and discussion. A concluding section suggests a structure and time frame for workshop activities. (LAP)

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Empowering Women at the Grassroots:
A manual for women's human rights education

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A PUBLICATION OF

NAGORIK UDDYOG
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Dhaka, Bangladesh

August 1995

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Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), USHA, Majid Mullick, our colleagues at Nagorik Uddyog for their valuable advice and help in the production of this Manual. We also thank Shulamith Koenig and the Organizing Committee for the Decade for Human Rights Education for their generous support in producing this material.

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INTRODUCTION

Introducing Nagorik Uddyog (Citizen's Initiative), Bangladesh

Nagorik Uddyog (Citizen's Initiative) is a non-profit, non-governmental Bangladeshi organization which focuses on empowering women at the grassroots through human rights education. Its aims and objectives are:

_ To work towards a participatory and accountable electoral system through the development of an informed and concerned electorate;

_ To develop an alternative process for education and awareness building regarding women's human rights, in particular the right to democratic political participation;

_ To promote the organization of women for more effective participation in the electoral process;

_ To ensure wider discussion on and concern with women's human rights so as to include it in the electoral agenda.

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The Context

Potentially rich in natural resources, Bangladesh, an agrarian society, is one of the economically and technologically underdeveloped countries in the world. Its population was estimated to be 110.9 million in 1991 of which 56.5 million were male and 53.4 million were female. Though women constitute nearly half of the total population, their situation reflects the state of poverty, and general socio-economic conditions of the country. Their involvement in overall social, cultural, and political activities is limited. Though the position of women in Bangladesh is changing, in terms of education, salaried employment and participation in decision-making they remain in a disadvantaged position in comparison to their male counterparts. Dominant patriarchal norms have largely been responsible for confining women within household activities and home based production.

Nevertheless, significant changes have taken place over the years and women are gradually becoming more visible in different spheres of life. Changes in the national and international policy environment, and the process of societal transition have contributed to this trend. The Declaration of 1975 as the International Year of the Women and 1976-85 as the UN Decade for Women had a tremendous impact on the worldwide concern for the cause of women. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, has been only *partially* ratified by the Bangladesh Government. It did not ratify articles 2, 13(a) and 16 (c) and (f)) one of which relates to the existing law of inheritance and the other to the practice of polygamy.

Women in Bangladesh are subject to various discriminations. Although the Constitution gives them equality with men in public life, in family matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance they are ruled by personal law sanctified by religious codes which discriminates against them. The demand for a Uniform Family Code has been raised by the women's movement to redress this situation.

However, there is a new regime of growing fundamentalist fervor which is being supported and strengthened by an establishment bent on maintaining and perpetrating existing power relations, both in relation to politics in general and to gender relations in particular. We think this is leading to newer, more specific forms of violence against women; a violence which among other things take the form of religious leaders, in connivance with the power structure, being in a position to order (*fatwa jari* or religious decree) the burning or stoning of a woman, or even stopping her from going to work or to vote; all this in total disregard of existing legal institutions. The targets of these *fatwas* have mostly been women who according to the village elite have transgressed boundaries: physical, sexual, familial and moral. Many grassroots development organizations are now faced with their women members having to undergo a *Salish* (a mediation by village leaders) which may or maynot be followed by a *fatwa*.

Politically, Bangladesh is a democratic state, albeit an unstable one. We are currently facing a constitutional crisis where all major opposition Member of Parliaments have resigned from their parliamentary posts, leaving a vacuum in the political arena. Furthermore 1996 is an election year and the contesting parties have already started campaigning. But the implication this has for women and their rights in general is of concern for us. So far, political parties have not especially been sensitive to gendered issues, Rather the nature of politics have been election-oriented, i.e. geared towards winning votes, and elections too have been fought on the basis of personality cults rather than issues. Thus issues such as

development, violence against women, or the protection of fundamental human rights have been marginalized in the campaign agenda. This is where Nagorik Uddyog chooses to intervene. It aims to empower women at the grassroots, by helping women to become aware about the problems they face, locally, in respect to their immediate milieu as well as nationally raising these issues in a political forum and placing them in the political agenda of public representatives. In this way Nagorik Uddyog seeks to work towards a participatory and accountable electoral system where women can be made part of an informed and concerned electorate.

About the Manual

Our manual focuses on raising the awareness of semi-literate/ and or illiterate groups of women about their rights as women and citizens of Bangladesh, with specific focus on their rights in political and public life.

Keeping in mind both our own purpose as well as the situation of the women we wish to reach, we feel that it is essential to incorporate a certain degree of conscientization regarding gender relations and the institutions of power before going onto human rights education proper. In this way the women would learn to situate themselves within the structural constraints of existing gender relations as well as the institutional constraints of existing power relations. This manual therefore includes in its first two sections an evaluation of the current situation of women in Bangladesh, more specifically the nature of oppression, awareness about the different national laws guiding the lives of women, religious nature of the personal laws, and their misuse by various parastatal apparatus (*village salish*) and community leaders,

The laws through which the lives of women and men in Bangladesh are shaped incorporate to a certain extent the structural and institutional constraints mentioned above. This is evident in the way Personal Law in Bangladesh is constructed to keep the personal from becoming political i.e. to treat matters such as marriage, divorce and inheritance within the domain of religious and social customs where unquestioningly the male dominates. At the same time our Constitution also confers equal rights to women in the public sphere, but then it is equally important to remember that our government had ratified the UNCEDAW document witholding its commitment to women's equality in some of these so-called 'personal' spheres. This contradiction has been captured in the section on the constitutional and international rights. Even while discussing women's rights in political and public life, women are perpetually reminded of the structural and institutional constraints they face; constraints which are reinforced by such contradictory conception of rights. The Manual thus tries to empower women by making them aware about their rights and responsibilities as citizens, voters and agents of change who could actively participate to bring in the women's issue at all political levels.

CHAPTER 1

Description and Analysis of the social political economic problems and position of women in Bangladesh

Objective: Description of the social, political and economic problems and position of women in Bangladesh and to establish women's right and equal status in society.

(a) To be conscious about women's rights and awareness about their position in society.
(b) To identify the social political and economic aspects of women's position and problems.
(c) To describe the discrimination and different status ascribed to women and men's work.
(d) To make an effort to establish women's right and their dignity in society.

Analysis A: Women occupy an important position in the construction and development of society. Starting with raising children in the family, a woman plays an important role in various aspects of social life. But her contribution is never given full acknowledgement. In most family matters, marriages, income earning and expenditure, likes dislikes, a woman's opinion is almost never asked. In many cases she is not able to express her opinion. Society in general do not acknowledge women's work either within the family or in public. Instead, they make value judgements regarding women and her work. They think that women should reside only in the home; there is no need to educate them; they should not be free to roam around. Because of these attitudes, women in our society lags behind. In order to develop our society we must change such attitudes/perceptions. So it is important for women to start learning to identify herself on the grounds that she chooses, relate to others on that basis, and acknowledge her difference with other women.

Activity: 1 Identifying Oneself
Choose a partner from the group; a person she does not know very well. For five minutes each partner should go away to a spot by themselves and exchange with the other, ones name, and any other attribute which she thinks she identifies with e.g. number of family members, what she does or her husband does etc. After this exercise they should come back and form a large group where each person should introduce her partner to the group. After all introductions a comparison may be done by the facilitator:

1. On what basis have participants identified themselves, familial relations, husband's job, children, religion, ethnicity, what one does etc.
2. Is it possible to recognize from this introductory stage, a group of 'women' or what is considered common to a women's identity? Is this identification our own or that imposed by society?

Activity: 2 Understanding Rights
Play a game: Without prior warning, the facilitator starts distributing sweets to participants, but gives to some and not others. What is the reaction of participants not receiving sweets. Do they feel deprived? Discriminated against? Feel that they have not been treated as equal? Can they relate this to real life situations? Have they felt discriminated as women?

Analysis B:
Social: Ours is a society, where women's mobility is restricted. As a result there is lack of access to education, employment and consequently a dependence upon men. For this reason, women cannot participate fully in various social activities such as income generation, education, institutions of social justice. As a result they do not get their due share of respect either in the family or society. This leads to the subordination of women in the family and in society.

Political: Although we have two women as our leaders in national politics, the participation of women in the political mainstream is still negligent. They have yet to become aware about their rights. They are still dependent on men to make their decisions. Although it is possible to notice a certain amount of participation in local elections, the role they play in national elections is negligent. Women are marginalized in the agenda of public policy and the manifestoes of political parties.

Economic: Despite the importance of their economic role, women's work is not generally acknowledged. Discrimination exists between male and female doing the same work. Because of *purdah* (segregation) women as producers cannot market their goods. As a result men control economic power. Women may access institutional loans but more often than not their husbands either spend it or invest it. The economic dependence of women prevents them from becoming self-reliant. The scope of non-traditional work has increased but due to social and cultural constraints, women are unable to take advantage of this situation. This in turn constrains the social development of the country.

Analysis C: Women are denied equal rights with men because they are thought to be 'physically inferior', but this kind of attitude evolves from a political and cultural mode of thinking called patriarchal ideology. In a family one may notice there are vast differences between the behavior of a brother and sister. Parents tend to look after the health and education of the boys more than girls. Girls are brought up to be good homemakers, As a result she is not taught many of the survival skills which her brother is taught. Hence the girl's fundamental right is denied.

Because of this attitudinal difference discrimination is to be noted in the sexual division of labour. Physical difference cannot be a severe constraint in most types of work and in terms of intellectual capacity, men and women are equal. It is the socialization process which have created discriminatory attitudes regarding women's work and not a natural division as is believed by many. Hence it is possible to make an end to such system. Hence it is necessary to overcome all these barriers and bring together men and women in the work they do.

Analysis D: About half the population is women. But they are not enjoying the rights due to them in the family or in society. Rather they are victims of injustice, violence and oppression. Uptill now both men and women have equally contributed to development. Thus one must make space for and give women the opportunity for equal participation in various aspects of social life.

Activity 3: We can show some pictures and raise some questions before starting the discussion.
Pictures: (a) Two pictures of a family taking their meal: where the boys get the first and bigger helping and alternatively where boys and girls get equal share.

(b) A girl being educated
(c) Husband beating wife
(d) A work chart of 'men's activity and women's activity' to be filled out by the participants themselves.

Questions relating to the picture (a)
1. What can we see?
2. Who is getting preferential treatment and why?
3. What should be the ideal situation?

Picture (b)
1. Can you identify with this picture?
2. Should girls be sent to school? Why or why not?

Picture (c)
1. Is this a familiar scene to you? Where have you seen it?
2. What can be the reason for the husband to beat his wife?
3. Do you think that a husband has a 'right' to beat his wife? (this is a common myth in Bangladesh)
4. What other kind of abuse against women can you identify?
5. Have you ever intervened or seen any one intervene in such matters. Who were they?
6. Can this situation be stopped? How?

Chart (d)
The facilitator divides the board into two sections: one to make a list of men's activities (husband's, father, brother from morning to night, and a similar one for women's activities (mother,self,sister)
Then discuss:
1. Who works the most?
2. Who brings in the most income?
3. Who takes various decisions in the family regarding, marriage, what to buy, what to cook, having children etc. (perhaps make another chart).
4. Should women play a decisive role in family matters?
5. What are the obstacles to this?
6. How will men benefit from the recognition of women as their equal partners?
7. What can women do to change their situation?

Conclusion: The role of men and women in development are equally important. In the present social context, women are not getting their rightful share and dignity due to their unequal status and social prejudice about them. The reasons behind these are inequality in education, their dependence on men, social constraints, discriminatory practices and existing law. This leads to social tyranny against women and deprivation of their rights. This state of affairs needs to change.Women must educate themselves. They need to participate in various activities in order to be self-reliant. Only then will their work in the family be held in esteem. In participating with men in decision-making, their dignity and status in society will be recognized.

CHAPTER 2

Law, Misuse of Religion and *Fatwabazi* (sermon-givers): how they discriminate against women and deprive their human rights

Objective: To identify the role played by law, religion and fatwas in depriving women of their rights.

1. What is the role of law in helping women assert their rights?
2. How does religion help to interprete women's role in society?
3. To raise awareness regarding *fatwabazis* (sermon-givers).

Analysis A: The Bangladesh Constitution gives women equality with men in public life, but in family matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance, custodianship, they are ruled by Personal Law sanctified by religious codes which discriminates against them. Thus law in Bangladesh plays an important role in both helping as well as constraining a women in her assertion of fundamental human rights. The law does have provisions for a woman's personal security (ensuring her mobility, guard against rape, mutilation through throwing acid). But the social structure is such that it is difficult to translate these provisions into reality. Hence violence against women is still rampant. It is important to go to the roots of such oppression. If we look at the existing law on inheritance, there too we can notice discrimination against men and women. A Muslim man gets half of the inherited property whereas a Muslim woman gets only one-fourth. A Hindu woman generally cannot inherit property unless in special circumstances.

Analysis B: Every religion treats women and men differently and sometimes this difference is culturally justified, For example, the notion that it is proper for women not to talk to strange men. But this may also work against the fundamental rights of women e.g. her rights to earn a livelihood, or her rights to freedom of movement. Most societies find a way to peacefully resolve such contradictions, but the problem arises when a certain power base starts using religion as a means of social control. This is evident in the current trend in Bangladesh of religious leaders giving *fatwas* (religious decrees) in connivance with the local elite, More often than not these *fatwas* are targetted against women who have purportedly transgressed social and moral norms. Poverty, superstition, fatalism, illiteracy, all combine to make a people passive and powerless and hence even more vulnerable to the reception of such kinds of notions. This is detrimental to the well-being of women. Thus an effort must be made to empower the masses economically, socially and politically.

Analysis C: In our society a woman is not seen as an individual, but in her relation to others. Domestic violence is prevalent in our society, but neither the state laws nor social practice are favorable to women in this respect. In many regions of Bangladesh, village mediation bodies (*salish*) sit to decide a fate of a woman who according to village leaders have transgressed social norms. This can range from anything from an illicit love affair to going out to work for her living. The verdict for her 'crimes' are given in the name of *fatwa*, which may include, giving her 50 whiplashes, placing her waist deep in a hole and stoning the upper part of her body, or even giving her a public beating. Notwithstanding the fact that such acts goes against the law of the land, these acts of violence continue to be perpetrated. To a large extent this implies the weakness and ineffectiveness of law enforcing agencies, lack of infrastructural support for women, legal counselling, shelters

etc. National development too is being constrained for many of these women play an important role as producers and as a result of such instances, many grassroots organization which involved women in their programmes are withdrawing from investing in further developmental activities. Of course in some areas resistance is being offerred by the villagers. Thus one needs to carefully evaluate the legal and paralegal structure in our society.

Method: Open discussion: Three stories may be told which illustrate the above three objectives. Personal security at work and at home, case studies of fatwas and the inadequacy of law and its execution. The stories may be told by the participants themselves, if possible by role-paying. Some questions may be asked on the basis of the stories told.

For example:
1. What are the constraints and problems which women face at work?
2. Is this acceptable?
3. What should be done about it?
4.How much personal security do we have?
5. What is responsible for lack of security?
6. How can we achieve such security?
8. What interpretations of women are religiously justified?
9. How are the Fatwabaz destroying the rights of women?
10. How can we resist such practices?

Highlight the responses and conclude.

Conclusion: In every aspects of social life, class, and household, women are in danger of losing their rights, dignity and status. Women are accused by self-proclaimed mediators of justice for merely exercizing their individual rights. This is not only to be seen in the villages, but in general as well. In administration, women occupy few posts higher up in the echelons of decision-making (for example in the Secretariat). Women are seen to participate in areas such as teaching, nursing and family planning. Even here their wages are discriminatory. Even though the Constitution of Bangladesh and UNCEDAW talks of equal rights, the rules regarding inheritance of property by men and women follow religious sanctions. Personal laws which follow these sanctions guide a woman's personal life from inheritance of property, to marriage, divorce, personal security and hence prevents her from exercising her rights as an individual. Politics which use religion, *fatwabazi*, inappropriate laws, ignorance and illiteracy all contribute to limit women in society and constrain development. Thus in the interest of development it is necessary to make an effort to institute women's rights in all spheres of society.

CHAPTER 3

Women's Rights in the Constitution and UNCEDAW

Objective: To identify women's rights in accordance to our Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) and the UNCEDAW. *Because Nagorik Uddyog is a civic education group, emphasis is given to political rights and the rights of a woman as a citizen as has been written in our Constitution and the UNCEDAW Declaration which our Government is signatory to.*

Analysis A: The Constitution , Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) and the UNCEDAW Declaration gives the following rights to men and women.

1. The right to vote as a citizen.
2. The right to participate as a candidate in elections
3. The right to organize in order to demand women's rights and express ones opinion freely.
4. To participate in public decision-making and execution.
5. To demand equal treatment in the eyes of justice.
6. The right to form a party or join a party.
7. To participate freely in public life and in private voluntary associations related to development.

Activity 1. Ask each sub-group to choose any of the above rights and enact a scene where a participant tries to assert her right, e.g. voting, going to court, forming a party etc. In the process try to identify the obstacles which prevent the participant from asserting her right as a woman.

Analysis B: The people are the source of all power: political economic social. The people elects a government through voting. The right to vote is thus integral to being a citizen of the country. The Constitution and UNCEDAW has declared:

1. Every citizen above the age of 18 has a right to vote.
2. They can participate as candidates in all elections, referendum, and in the election of all elected bodies

Analysis C: UNCEDAW and Universal Declaration of Human Rights affords the same rights and responsibilities equally to men and women, all girls and boys, by virtue of their humanity and regardless of any role or relationship they may have. Here are some of the rights.

1. The right to claim, change or retain a nationality.
2. Equal opportunities in education, following the same curricula, equal pay, allowance etc.
3. The right to the same criteria of selection as men in seeking employment
4. Equal pay, and other facilities, and same criteria in evaluation of work.
5. Not to discriminate women on the basis of marriage or motherhood
6. Equal participation in every level of developmental planning and execution.
7. Same responsibility in the case of marriage and divorce.
8. Equal rights as husband and wife including the right to choose family name, profession and income.

9. The right to own property as gift or as a result of transaction, marriage, direct, consume and sell it in the same capacity as a man.

Method: Discuss the above through these questions:
1. What are our political rights?
2. Are we enjoying these rights?
3.How can the government help us in this respect?
4.What should women do about it?
5. Why do we have votes? Who is eligible for voting?
6. Who has the power to form a government?
7.Are women able to apply her full rights?
8. How can that be made possible?

From the responses highlight three conclusions:
1. It is possible to apply and exercize ones political rights.
2. The right to vote is an important right.
3.It is also important to assert other rights and exercize them.

To end the discussion:
Although both our Constitution and the UNCEDAW documents have ensured the political rights of our women, cultural conservatism, orthodoxy and patriarchal values to which our Government responds often prevent women from being able to exercise their political rights. Also political parties themselves are not incorporating women's issues into their agendas. Existing laws operating in a patriarchal society cannot do enough to help women in this respect.

In the case of the right to vote, the mere exercising of ones right is not enough. Sufficient thought is not given to why one needs to vote or of what use it is to the voter. In addition despite there being certain provisions in the law for equal rights and the personal security of a woman, such laws are not being properly executed, because of social constraints. Thus women should become organized and pool in their resources and efforts to overcome these obstacles. Starting with awareness building, they should be able to take their agenda through their organization to the political parties and present them to the government.

CHAPTER 4

Women's Rights in Political and Public Life

Objective: To raise awareness regarding a women's rights in political and public life.
a. to ensure voting rights
b. to know electoral rules
c.to be aware about the duties and responsibilities of a voter
d.to select a criteria for ones representative / candidate
e. to place agenda and demands to the candidate
f. what to do if one wants to run for office

Analysis A: Voting rights are an important aspect of human rights. The government of a country is formed through the vote. It is a necessary part of democracy. But women are not aware of this. Rather than take voting for granted we must use our votes to help build a better future for women. Furthermore we see in many places there is a trend in may places where fatwa (religious decree) has been given against women voting. This is in contradiction to the law of the land.

Activity 1: Relate a story of a case where women were not allowed to vote, by the men in their families, or by their community leaders. Then discuss:
1. Who has the right to vote?
2. Why do we vote?
3. What are the obstacles faced by women if they wish to exercise their voting rights?
4. Can we form the government we wish through exercising our voting rights?
5. Who has the power to form a government?
6. How can we influence this process?

Thus from the above discussion it will become apparent that voting is an important instrument through which women can change their lives for the better.

Analysis B: Electoral Rules: Election is one of the peaceful means of transferring power. In order to participate in an election one must be a Bangladeshi citizen and above 18 years of age. One needs to be aware of all the rules relating to the polling process.

Activity 2: Discussion:
1. Why elections? Why is it necessary?
2. Why are you participating in an election? Are you expecting anything out of this?
3. What problems or constraints will you face in freely participating in the polls i.e. in making your own free choice? (terrorism, bribery, influential elites etc)
4. How will you overcome such problems?
5. Are we abiding by the rules set by the Election Commission?

Conclude with emphasis on the importance of making ones choice independently of all pressures and influence from all quarters.

Analysis C: Responsibilities of the voter: The voters have an important duty to perform in the election. Because from the point of participation in elections to the time of winning it, the candidate relies on the voters.A conscious and informed constituency of voters can determine to what extent polls will be rigged, votes bought or influenced by men. One has to be made aware of it.

Activity 3: We will look at different pictures of voting behavior e.g. voting independently, vote-buying, terrorist activity.

Open Discussion:
1. How have you reached your decision regarding who to vote?
2.To take money from a party is illegal, how can one resist this?
3. Have the candidates kept their electoral promises? Are these promises in line with electoral rules?
4. If not, then what can be done about it?

Now conclude : From the beginning to the end of the electoral process the responsibility of the voter is immense. Because of a patriarchal society, coupled with poor literacy rate among women, women cannot vote independently of their husbands or male guardians. They become easily influenced. Besides, both men and women are seduced into taking money in exchange for their vote. One should therefore resist all kinds of terrorism and be made aware of ones right to choose freely the candidate one likes.

Analysis D: A constituency of informed voters is essential to the sustenance of a democratic system. Hence a voter must be careful about the criteria on which to select her candidate. Ideally the candidate has to be of good character, welfare -oriented, be capable of fulfilling his/her election promises.

Activity 4: The following story is about how a candidate has actually been selected.

In the last Union, Sharif Miah, an illiterate member of Krishnanagar Union, went on a door to door campaign. He enquired after everyones welfare. He promised to develop the village in every way. One of the most important problems which the village faced was the repair of an old road. Before the elections Sharif Miah promised to repair the road and look after other problems of the villagers, if they voted him to office.

A free and fair election took place. Sharif Miah was elected as a Member. But after becoming a Member, he forgot all about the villagers. He started getting involved in all sorts of underhand business. He demanded bribes in arbitrating village conflicts, demanded more money in cases where a certification of the Union Parishod was needed. He sank a tubewell in his own front yard using public money. And furthermore, he pocketed all the wheat which was meant for payment to the laborers in the canal digging and road repairing projects.

After all this, Sharif Miah again ran for office in the next elections! This time too he went on a door to door campaign, promising everyone virtually everything. In addition he took a new strategy. He enticed villagers by distributing money among them, especially those who appeared to be more clever than the rest. He also threatened the villagers. Some hired people made speeches and campaigned on his behalf. He got a few votes, but the majority of the people were dissatisfied with his past activities, and hence he lost.

Questions:
1. Was Sharif Miah a good candidate? Would you have voted for him the second time?
2. What are the requirements of a good candidate?
3. Had he fulfilled his election promises?
4. Why did he lose?

Now conclude;
We participate in an election by exercising our right to vote. The duties and responsibilities of the the voter is immense. For women, one of the problem is that they are often not allowed to exercise their own choice. They also are kept ignorant of the rules and procedures of elections. They also tend to vote for anyone whom they know personally or locally. In this way, other criteria of selection are not considered. One must remember that the people have a right not to vote for someone they dislike or disagree with. No amount of fear or bribery should prevent them from exercizing their rightful choice. Only with such an informed constituency of voters, can free and fair election take place in the country and the democratic system be held accountable.

Analysis: E: Raising demands and presenting a memorandum:
Prior to the elections, or even outside electoral politics, women can present their demands in the form of a memorandum to the candidates of their choice or to the relevant authorities as the occassion demands. In this way they can help to sensitize the political agendas of the candidates to gender-based issues. In this way too they can raise issues which concern them and lobby relevant authorities on it. Women may also in alliance with men of their community, group together to keep a watch on their candidates, to see whether they are dealing with the problems they raised and keeping their election promises.

Activity 5: Open Discussion:
1. Why is it necessary to make ones demand felt through presenting a memorandum?
2. In what other ways can one make ones demands?
3. Does it help to raise awareness about gender-based problems?

Role -playing: Go through the processes of forming a gender-based agenda and present it to a candidate of your choice or to the Chairperson of the Union Porishod.

Analysis: F: Being a Candidate and Identifying issues: Women themselves can run for office.
Activity 6: Tell the following story: When Farida's husband died, she was left to fend for herself and three children. None of her in-laws came to help. Only a brother made occasional visits to see how she was doing, but because he himself was unemployed he was of no great help. She decided to take loan from the Grameen Bank in her village and set up a rice trading business. In this way she has become solvent and is now in the position of sending all three children to school. She herself has become a group leader and has earned for herself a name in the community, as a honest and hard worker. The Union Council elections are looming ahead, and friends of Farida is urging her to run for office.

Now:
(1) Would you give your support to Farida? Why or why not?
(2) What would be her strong points, what would be her weak points?
(3) What are the obstacles she is likely to face and from who?

(4) Does the Election Commission, the Administration, the police have anything to say about Farida running for office?
(5) What sort of issues is she likely to take up? Will they be different from other candidates?
(6) What are the chances of Farida winning?

Activity 7: Role Playing: Stage a mock election acting out the roles of a good candidate, bad candidate etc.

To Conclude:
More and more women should participate in public and political life both as informed voters as well as candidates running for office. In order to realize these goals it maybe that they would first have to assert other rights. For example, she would first of all need to be sufficiently self-reliant in terms of both finance and education, thus reducing her dependency on others. The struggle is uphill and long-term, for the odds are many. But it is not impossible!

CONCLUSION

Workshop Structure and Activities

Session 0:
Building up the Atmosphere: Time: 2 hrs

1. Introducing one another	15 min.
2. Warming up: play a game	45 min.
3. Explain the objectives of the course in an interactive way, taking into account what the trainees want to know, Chalk up a list	30 min
4. Divide the group into sub-groups	15 min
5. Draw up a chart of workshop rules on the basis of interaction	15 min

Session 1:
Analysis of women's social, cultural, political and economic status 1.45 min.

1. Explain the objectives of the session and divide up the the group into four small groups	10 min.
2. Ask each group to identify, problems faced by women in social, cultural, political, economic spheres, and analyze the reasons behind them by showing them pictures	45 min.
3. Report the results of small group discussion to the whole group	40 min.
4. Summarize and conclude	10 min.

Session 2:
How inadequate and unexecuted law, misuse of religion and fatwabazi relates to women's underdevelopment 1.10 min

1. How different laws, and religious sanctions constrain women's lives: explain these through use of flip charts, film, transparencies and discussion and presenting case studies of fatwas.	45 min.
2. Small groups will discuss three problems faced by wome: their lack of personal security, fatwas, and inadequacy of law and their execution and how they affect their lives	40 min.
3. Feed back to large group and opinions and discussion heard	40 min.
4. Summarize and conclude	5 min.

Session 3:
The Constitution , UNCEDAW and Women's Rights 2.00 hr

1. Study the rights political, economic and social rights given to women in our Constitution and UNCEDAW: first explain in a guided study method Then break up in small groups to role-play one of the rights	1.00 hr
2. Each group will present one aspect of the rights to the large group in addition to the explanation offered by the trainer	40. min.
3. Summarize through illustration using slide projector, flip charts etc.	15 min.
4. Conclude	5 min.

Session 4: in two parts

Voting and electoral rights of Bangladeshi women and their responsibilities 6.00 hrs.

Part I

1. Identify obstacles faced by women in exercizing her political rights: 30 min
Story telling and discussion

2. Small groups to discuss through brain storming and visualising: 60.min
What are election rules and how are they transgressed
Identify ideal pattern of voting behaviour
Identify criteria of good candidate

SMALL BREAK 15 min

3. Identify women's concerns in small groups and then each group agree on priorities and place them in general session in the form of a memorandum 60 min

BREAK 60 min.

Part II

4. Lobby the Union council on a problem which concerns women: role-playing .45min

5. Define criteria of candidate, choose a candidate to whom one can take women's agenda and then hold a mock election 60 min.

5. Summarize and conclude 30 min.